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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
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INFO RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 7651

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: RADIO SILENCE FROM NEW SAUDI OPPOSITION GROUP IN
PARIS

REF: A. A) RIYADH 6737
[1](#)B. B) RIYADH 6472

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: Several media outlets reported a statement on August 7 issued by Prince Talal Muhammad Al-Rasheed, a deposed royal and Saudi dissident residing in Paris, which announced the formation of the Saudi Democratic Opposition Front. The group, which is reportedly both secular and tribal in nature, bases its opposition to the SAG on its "desire for democracy," an enhancement of liberties within Saudi society, and an end to "corruption" within the SAG (Ref A). Although its statement promised upcoming activities, there have been no stirrings other than in the Western media to date. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Prince Talal Al-Rasheed, a deposed royal of the regional dynasty of al-Ha'il who kept his title in exile, announced the formation of the Saudi Democratic Opposition Front on August 7 from Paris. The statement was initially reported in the London-based newspaper "Al-Quds Al-Arabi," to which his daughter is a regular contributor. It was later reported in other major media, such as Al-Jazeera and AFP, in addition to several conservative internet sites.

[1](#)3. (C) The declared main objective of the Saudi Democratic Opposition Front is to establish democratic institutions based upon equality and justice and to stop the "corruption" of the Al Saud family. The statement itself avoided any religious undertones; it did not mention Islam, Shari'a, or the Quran. On the contrary, the statement seemed to address the more liberal, reform-minded thinkers in the Kingdom, using a call for democracy and justice to lure supporters. Additionally, Al-Rasheed talked about the current Lebanon crisis and criticized the SAG's response as "weak." He called for his supporters to ensure that the Al Saud rule in the interest of the Kingdom and ignore the influences of foreign countries.

[1](#)4. (C) Al-Rasheed reportedly claimed that the movement would have a satellite television channel broadcasting from Europe within three months. He plans to use the channel to "call on Saudis to rise up against the tyrants and usurpers plundering public funds." Al-Rasheed also said that he plans to coordinate the group's activities with the recently revitalized London-based opposition group MIRA, which is linked to al-Qaeda, despite MIRA's radical religious ideology and extremist ties (Ref B). He claimed that his group has 2,000 active members in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, and said he hopes it will gain support as its activities increase. However, there has been no additional information released since August 7, and no indication of coordination from MIRA's media outlets.

15. (C) Prince Talal Al-Rasheed is the son of the last ruler of the Emirate of Ha'il prior to the beginning of the Al Saud rule in 1921. The Al-Rasheed family comes from the large tribal confederation of Bani Shammur, in the northern region of the Kingdom, to which King Abdullah's mother belonged. Prince Talal Al-Rasheed has lived in exile in France since 1980 because of the SAG's disapproval of his opposition activities. His daughter Madawiy Al-Rasheed, a London-based academic, publishes books, newspaper editorials, and internet commentary on the SAG, often in a critical manner. She spoke publicly on Al-Jazeera television on August 15 about her father's new movement in Paris and criticized the SAG for "corruption" and the Al Saud's "lack of support" for pan-Arab causes dating back to King Abdul Aziz.

16. (C) COMMENT: Al-Rasheed lacks visibility and credibility on the Saudi political scene. The mainstream and Western media picked up the story of the opposition group and published it over the course of several days. Following this media flurry, however, there has been no indication of further activity. Al-Rasheed's secular call for opposition is likely to ensure that Islamic conservatives will not support his movement, and apart from a handful of tribal and family members who may oppose the Al Saud rule, there does not seem to be any base of support. Al-Rasheed's efforts are unlikely to prove fruitful, but his movement's emergence is a sign of a flurry of opposition activity in the wake of recent regional crises. END COMMENT.
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